

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 DAMASC 07990 281152Z

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 6205

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 7990

NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM MURPHY

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3

TAGS: PFOR US SY XF

SUBJ: ASSAD AND PRESIDENT CARTER'S TRIP

REF: A) STATE 302567 B) DAMASCUS 7852

SUMMARY: ASSAD CONSIDERS PRESENT MOMENT NOT REPEAT NOT PROPITIOUS FOR MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CARTER BECAUSE OF NEGATIVE DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING PEACE PRECESS CAUSED BY PRESIDENT SADAT'S INITIATIVES. END SUMMARY.

1. DEPUTY FONMIN AL-KHANI SUMMONED ME TO FOREIGN MINISTRY BY MIDNIGHT TELEPHONE CALL DECEMBER 27/28. AL-KHANI APOLOGIZED FOR THE LATENESS OF THE HOUR BUT SAID THAT PRESIDENT ASSAD HAD CHARGED HIM TO ENSURE DELIVERY OF LATTER TO PRESIDENT CARTER PRIOR TO PRESIDENT'S DEPARTURE ON HIS OVERSEAS TRIP. HE ALSO REGRETTED THAT PRESIDENCY HAD BEEN UNABLE TO LOCATE ITS TRANSLATOR TO FURNISH US OFFICIAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXT. FOLLOWING, THEREFORE, IS THE EMBASSY'S UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION OF ASSAD'S LETTER. (ORIGINAL BEING POUCHED TO NEA/ARN.)

2. QUOTE DEAR MR. PRESIDENT:

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I WAS PLEASED TO RECEIVE YOUR LETTER DATED DECEMBER 6, 1977 DELIVERED TO ME BY SECRETARY OF STATE VANCE DURING OUR MEETING ON DECEMBER 13, 1977 IN WHICH YOU REFERRED TO THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUING CONSULTATIONS BETWEEN US CONCERNING THE SITUATION AND LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

I SHARE YOUR VIEW THAT IT IS IMPORTANT WE CONTINUE

OUR EXCHANGES. I AM CERTAIN THAT
SECRETARY OF STATE VANCE HAS CONVEYED TO YOU MY VIEWPOINT
CONCERNING EVENTS TAKING PLACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST
IN THE WAKE OF THE INITIATIVE OF THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT
AND HIS MEETINGS WITH ISRAELI OFFICIALS.
SINCE MY MEETING WITH SECRETARY VANCE, NOTHING
HAS CHANGED THIS VIEWPOINT OF MINE. ON THE CONTRARY,
THE RECENT ISMAILIA MEETING INCREASED MY CONVICTION
THAT THE ROAD FOLLOWED BY THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT WOULD

NOT LEAD TO REALIZATION OF A JUST AND COMPREHENSIVE
PEACE AND THAT THE MOST THAT IT COULD LEAD TO WOULD
BE A SEPARATE RECONCILIATION (ARABIC "SULH") BETWEEN
EGYPT AND ISRAEL, THE CONSEQUENCES OF WHICH WOULD
OBSTRUCT THE PEACE PROCESS WHICH HAS BEEN AND REMAINS
THE OBJECTIVE WE ARE WORKING TO REALIZE.

I DO NOT NEED TO REPEAT WHAT I HAVE AFFIRMED MORE
THAN ONCE, THAT THE DESIRED PEACE WOULD NOT BE REALIZED
BY PARTIAL SOLUTIONS SUCH AS EGYPT PREVIOUSLY MADE
WHEN IT CONCLUDED THE SINAI II AGREEMENT OR THE SEPARATE
RECONCILIATION WHICH INDICATIONS ARE WILL BE THE FINAL
OUTCOME OF THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT'S INDIVIDUALISTIC INITIATIVES.
YOU WILL APPRECIATE THAT THIS VIEWPOINT OF MINE IS
NOT NEW. I WOULD HAVE WANTED VERY MUCH TO MEET AGAIN
WITH YOU AFTER OUR CORDIAL MEETING IN GENEVA HAD
DEVELOPMENTS IN THE AREA SITUATION PROCEEDED IN A
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LESS NEGATIVE WAY AND (HAD THEY) ADVANCED THE CHANCES OF
HOLDING THE GENEVA CONFERENCE IN THE WAY IN WHICH WE WERE
TRYING TO CONVENE IT, WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF ALL
PARTIES CONCERNED WITH THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE AND THE
MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT.

I TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE NEW YEAR TO SEND TO YOU
MY BEST WISHES AND HOPE THAT 1978 WILL BE MORE PROPITIOUS
FOR ACHIEVEMENT OF A JUST AND COMPREHENSIVE PEACE IN
THIS REGION AFTER THE LONG TRAGEDIES THROUGH WHICH ITS
PEOPLE HAVE LIVED FOR THIRTY YEARS. SINCERELY, HAFEZ
ASSAD. DECEMBER 27, 1977 UNQUOTE

3. COMMENT: DELIVERY OF THIS LETTER FOLLOWED NOT ONLY
THE ISMAILIA MEETING, TO WHICH ASSAD REFERS,
BUT ALSO HIS DECEMBER 27 MEETING WITH JORDANIAN PRIME
MINISTER BADRAN AND HUSSEIN'S COURT ADVISOR ABDUL HAMID
SHARAF. I AM INCLINED TO DOUBT THAT WHATEVER TRANSPIRED
BETWEEN THE JORDANIANS AND SYRIANS INFLUENCED THE
PRESIDENT'S DECISION NOT TO MEET WITH PRESIDENT CARTER.
AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF OFFICIALLY-INSPIRED MASS
DEMONSTRATIONS DENOUNCING SADAT'S INITIATIVES AND THE
RESPONSIBILITY WHICH THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP STILL ATTRIBUTES

TO WASHINGTON FOR THESE INITIATIVES, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN
AT BEST AWKWARD FOR ASSAD TO MEET WITH PRESIDENT
CARTER AT THIS MOMENT.

4. I AM VERY GLAD, HOWEVER, THAT WE MADE THIS OFFER. IT
UNDERLINED PRESIDENT CARTER'S DESIRE TO STAY IN CLOSEST
POSSIBLE TOUCH WITH ASSAD, THEREBY REAFFIRMING THE VALUE
WE SEE IN THIS RELATIONSHIP. AWARENESS OF OUR OFFER,
AND THE TACTFUL WAY IN WHICH IT WAS PHASED, IS WIDESPREAD IN
THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AS WELL AS IN THE PRESIDENCY AND
WILL HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT ON OUR FUTURE DEALINGS WITH SYRIA.
HAD THE MEETING OCCURRED, I DOUBT IT WOULD HAVE HELPED CONVINCE
ASSAD THAT SADAT IS ON THE CORRECT PATH, OR EVEN THAT, AT
THIS POINT IN TIME, ASSAD SHOULD ORDER A SLACKENING OF SYRIA'S
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CAMPAIGN AGAINST EGYPT. THE PRESENT CAMPAIGN, I FEAR, WILL HAVE
TO RUN ITS COURSE OWING TO A COMPLEX OF REASONS, INCLUDING ASSAD'S
CONVICTION THAT SADAT HAS WEAKENED ARAB SOLIDARITY TO NO AVAIL
SYRO-EGYPTIAN RIVALRY, SYRO-PLO RELATIONSHIPS AND ASSAD'S
EVIDENT DETERMINATION TO STEER SYRIA ON THE EXTREMELY TRICKY
COURSE BETWEEN YIELDING TO RUJECTIONIST PRESSURES AND ONE
SUPPORTING
SADAT'S INITIATIVES.
MURPHY

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